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COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY NOTE*

Panama

SUMMARY

The Executive Director presents the country programme strategy note for Panama for a programme of cooperation for the period 1997 to 2001.

Panama has restored democracy and presently is experiencing buoyant economic growth and making good progress in the social sectors. However, a large part of the population still is not benefiting sufficiently from the economic progress and from social services. The Government is focusing on disparity reduction. The goals of the World Summit for Children might be reached and sustained if more national resources focused on the poorest groups and the capacity and efficiency of public sector institutions were improved.

The proposed country programme strategy would address five objectives related to: (a) implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; (b) improved monitoring of the situation of children and women; (c) better protection of children at risk; (d) increasing community awareness of child rights; and (e) support for services in poor municipalities. Interlinked strategies of empowerment, capacity-building, advocacy and social mobilization and, to a limited extent, service delivery, will support three programmes: promotion of children's and woman´s rights; municipal social development; and a "stay in school" initiative. Advocacy and social mobilization, capacity-building at the municipal level and the empowerment of poor communities, particularly of indigenous populations, in local-level planning and implementation will focus on disparity reduction for the poorest municipalities.

* E/ICEF/1996/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its third regular session of 1996.

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THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN

1. For Panama, the first half of the 1990s was a period of restoration of democracy and economic recovery from the devastating crisis of 1987-1990. Gross national product per capita reached $2,600 in 1993, among the highest in Latin America. However, the top 20 per cent of the country's 2.6 million inhabitants receive 45 times more income than the bottom 20 per cent. Approximately 40 per cent of the population do not generate sufficient income to meet all of their basic needs. Social policies are trying to cope with this problem by supporting progressive decentralization of social programmes.

2. By the end of 1995, it is likely that the mid-decade goals for the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, universal salt iodination and reduction of deaths due to acute respiratory infections will be achieved, but policy changes and external support will be needed to achieve the nutrition goals for the decade. The decade goals for infant and maternal mortality will not be reached if the trends of 1990-1994 continue. Additional efforts will be required in rural areas. The decade goals for water supply and sanitation and primary education may be reached through the reallocation of governmental resources to less developed areas.

3. Rural inhabitants, particularly the country's 200,000 indigenous people, have yet to benefit fully from progress and development. The infant mortality rate, estimated at 24.7 per 1,000 live births, is four times higher among indigenous infants. The national maternal mortality rate is 55 per 100,000 live births, in contrast with 440 in provinces with mainly indigenous populations. An estimated 70 per cent of all maternal mortality occurs in rural areas. Coverage of both water supply and sanitation services, at almost 90 per cent nationally and close to the national programme of action (NPA) goal, is below 60 per cent in three provinces with the highest concentration of indigenous people. Illiteracy among indigenous women, at 53 per cent, is five times the national average. Panama has achieved a net primary school enrolment ratio above 90 per cent, but in peri-urban settlements and rural indigenous areas, drop-out and repetition rates are more than twice the national average, and fewer than 50 per cent of students reach the fifth grade.

4. Panama ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and submitted its first report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1995. The recently approved Family Act still needs to be fully harmonized with the provisions of the Convention. Child protection rights, as defined by the Convention, frequently are challenged by institutions and individuals who cite an increase in crime and violence by urban, marginalized youngsters. A challenge for UNICEF cooperation, therefore, is to help Panama expedite its encouraging efforts to focus on implementation of the Convention and reduce disparities with respect to child survival, development and protection.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAST COOPERATION

5. An evaluation of projects for disabled children concluded that centralized services were not sustainable. Therefore, UNICEF has phased out support to centralized institutions in favour of promoting cost-effective approaches that include cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as community-based education for disabled children.

6. The mid-term review revealed that the primary health programme supports capacity-building at the national level, but that there is inadequate support to capacity-building in provincial- and local-level planning as well as in social communications and community participation. An evaluation of the management of the expanded programme on immunization revealed the need to improve coordination among central, provincial and local levels.

7. The water supply and sanitation programme was designed to provide services to rural and peri-urban areas. However, a 1993 evaluation showed the need to enhance and improve community organization and training of local water committees to ensure sustainability of services. Consequently, cooperation has shifted towards capacity-building and support for low-cost technologies, community participation and education in personal hygiene and environmental sanitation.

8. Programmes for children in especially difficult circumstances and education have close links with urban children and youth, but have yet to achieve this link with rural, particularly indigenous, children. Greater advocacy and increased monitoring will be needed to strengthen the focus on indigenous populations.

9. Most NGOs and some municipalities with progressive mayors are receptive to a gender-sensitive approach in the design of social policies and programmes. However, most public institutions do not easily adapt to the analysis of gender gaps and disparities. More systematic and sustained advocacy and technical support are needed at all levels.

10. In the adaptation of national legislation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF will have to upgrade its roster of sources of international assistance in order to provide the expertise required for the completion of a comprehensive Children's Act.

PROPOSED COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY

11. The Government's socio-economic policies for the remainder of the decade will try to reduce the significant concentration of income and wealth in the possession of a few and redirect the allocation of resources to focus on social investments in the poorest areas, with priority on improving the quality of education and expanding basic services to those living in absolute poverty, especially children and women.

12. The objectives of the proposed programme of cooperation are to assist the Government in its efforts to develop strategies for the reduction of social disparities through the following: (a) compliance with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and achievement of the NPA goals; (b) the development of information management systems to monitor the realization of the rights of children and women and attainment of goals; (c) improved protection of children at high risk; (d) increasing awareness of communities and children themselves about the rights of the child; and (e) support for the expansion of coverage of basic services in the poorest municipalities.

13. The main strategies to be applied in the new country programme include the transfer of knowledge and skills to empower people in 15 of the poorest municipalities to strengthen their use of information about child rights, services and economic opportunities. Training and social mobilization will improve the capacity of those communities to make effective use of information to improve their social situations. Capacity-building will include technical assistance and training to improve planning, monitoring and evaluation at central, regional and municipal levels in order to expand and sustain the coverage of basic services and to reduce social disparities. The training of teachers and health/social workers and the development of information systems at the municipal level constitute the cornerstone of this strategy. Some institutions, such as the office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights, will be strengthened to combine the monitoring of children's and women's rights with advocacy measures.

14. Information on socio-economic disparities will support the efforts of mass media to raise consciousness of and sensitivity towards the situation of children and women as part of the strategy for advocacy and social mobilization. Associations such as "Communicators for Children" and "Women in the Mass Media" will promote the principles of the two Conventions. UNICEF will promote and document community meetings and other events which permit a direct dialogue between children and youth and decision makers within the public and private sectors.

15. UNICEF cooperation will not include assistance for the provision of basic services. Government resources and cooperation with the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank will help to meet the costs of infrastructure, equipment, supplies and personnel needed for basic services. UNICEF will provide technical assistance for designs to expand coverage of basic services and related capacity-building initiatives.

16. An emerging strategy for local fund-raising is based partly on the fact that income raised with the UNICEF Greeting Card and related Operations increased by 300 per cent over 1993-1994 to gross $76,000 in 1994. Dissemination of more information to the business community could mobilize participation in, and funding of, UNICEF-supported projects. There is already some indication that programmes benefiting especially marginalized urban children and youth could attract local private sector contributions.

17. The country programme strategy will include three programmes. The promotion of children's and women's rights will aim to increase awareness of the principles of the two Conventions and to help mobilize country resources and political will to implement them. The technical secretariat of the Social Ministry will be the principal point for monitoring and information activities. Universities and other knowledge centres will be linked to an information system on the situation of children and women and will be supported in selected policy research related to the two Conventions. UNICEF will develop partnerships with the private sector for its participation in social services and to mobilize popular support for a comprehensive Children's Act, which would complete harmonization of national legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

18. The municipal social development plan will facilitate increasing public social investment in the poorest municipalities. The United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization/Pan American Health Organization and UNICEF will jointly support the promotion, development and implementation of municipal social development plans (MSDPs), with an emphasis on primary health care, water supply and environmental sanitation and basic education in selected provinces. The mayor and the municipal council will be the coordinating entity, and the MSDP will be implemented by local public institutions, with community participation and support from NGOs. UNICEF will support integrated social planning in 15 of the poorest municipalities in accordance with the results of annual municipal situation analyses. Training of municipal personnel and NGOs will be a priority, as will building partnerships with the private sector. The population covered will number 300,000, of whom 65 per cent are indigenous people, 48,000 are children under five years of age of five, 51,000 are children in the primary school age-group and 128,000 are women of child-bearing age.

19. A "stay in school" initiative aims to create new opportunities to reintegrate children and adolescents into the educational system. UNICEF will support this initiative in five low-income urban communities with 15 primary schools, 400 teachers and 12,000 students. Youth, aged 12-16 years, will be offered life skills training programmes by NGOs, private enterprises and the Institute for Human Resource Development. The Ministry of Works will be the main partner, and 3,000 unemployed youngsters and their families will participate. Parental groups will be organized to support local schools through

community organizations and NGOs. Selected schools will receive additional educational materials and training programmes for teachers. A special supervisory group from the Ministry of Education will provide technical assistance to local school administrators and monitor and evaluate the programme.

20. The Panama country programme will participate in UNICEF-supported subregional initiatives in Central America and strengthen the social sectors through the integration process. This will enable the country programme to use organizational links, agreements and resources of the Integration Treaty to improve the situation of women and children.

ESTIMATED PROGRAMME BUDGET

Estimated programme cooperation 1997-2001 a/
(In thousands of United States dollars)

	General resources	Supplementary funds	Total
Promotion of children's and women's rights	1 250	2 250	3 500
Municipal social development	1 750	4 250	6 000
Stay in school initiative	750	2 250	3 000
Total	3 750	8 750	12 500

a/ These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.